Have You Prayed?

(May 14, 2023)

The Bible teaches us the importance of prayer. For Christians, prayer is as essential as breathing. And yet, prayer has many different aspects.

I. Have You Asked God?

We all face worries. When we worry, our hearts grow heavy, our minds slow down, and nothing goes well. God has given us the ability to think, to analyze, and to make decisions. These are our human responsibilities. But sometimes we are so troubled that even these abilities seem paralyzed. To live with fewer such burdens and with greater peace, it is important to place our trust in God in advance, by prayer. If we only start praying after trouble strikes, it may feel like "too little, too late." Still, even then, it is better to pray than not. Remember Peter on the stormy lake—sinking, he cried out desperately, "Lord, save me!" And Jesus reached out and lifted him up, gently rebuking him: "Why were you afraid?"

Prayer begins with asking. Our requests may be selfish or foolish, for we humans are often childish in our desires. If God granted every human request, the world would fall into chaos. It is God's wisdom not to answer everything exactly as we ask. Yet even a prayer that is not granted is valuable, because it draws us closer to God. Just as a small child makes unreasonable demands of a parent, so our petitions, even when denied, nurture the closeness of relationship.

Prayer is not really about reducing the distance between us and God—God is already near. But when we keep asking, we begin to feel his nearness more deeply. And that sense of God's closeness is what matters most.

II. Have You Given Thanks?

Prayer is not only asking—it also includes thanksgiving. Some people ask endlessly, even when their requests are answered, and never give thanks. That is a great shame.

Whether or not our prayers are answered as we hoped, we should thank God simply for hearing us.

Counselors say that often the most important part of their work is simply to listen patiently, without giving advice. People feel half healed just by being heard. God patiently listens to all our complaints. That alone deserves our thanks.

Have you thanked God for providing your needs before you even asked? For raising the sun, sending rain, growing trees, letting fish swim, making cherry blossoms bloom, and ripening the loquat fruit? For giving you life, air, water, food, and even parents who sometimes scold? Thanksgiving can be expressed in many ways. The poor widow who gave two copper coins at the temple was not just giving money—she was offering her gratitude. Jesus praised her, saying she gave more than all the others. God delights in simple, sincere thanksgiving.

III. Have You Offered Praise?

The highest form of prayer is praise. Thanksgiving is a response to what someone has done for us. Even if a person is otherwise unkind, we still give thanks when they do us good. But praise is different: it is not for what is done, but for who the person is. Praise exalts the character of the one who acts.

So too with God. We praise him not merely for what he has given us, but because he is, in himself, good and glorious. From him flow countless blessings, but even apart from these, he is worthy of praise.

Let us praise him for the small things—for peace in society, for creating us in his image, for giving us the capacity to feel, rejoice, and be moved. Let us say, “God, you are wonderful.” Let us praise him as the Maker of this intricate and harmonious universe, filled with mysteries beyond our perception or measurement.

Scientists tell us that more than 96% of the universe is composed of invisible matter and energy, beyond all instruments of observation. This suggests dimensions unseen, realms perhaps not unlike our own. The Bible does not explain everything about creation—its focus is on human salvation. That is why it says nothing of trilobites, ammonites, or dinosaurs. But it tells us enough to know that God is Creator, and that he made us in his image.

Just as we ourselves are pleased when we are not only thanked but also praised, so God delights in our praise. Of course, pride is a danger, but humility accepts praise without arrogance. Japanese culture has a lovely proverb: *"The ears of rice bow lower as they grow fuller."* This expresses humility more beautifully than some so-called "Christian" cultures that overemphasize recognition.

Therefore, when we pray, let us always give thanks, and let us end with praise.